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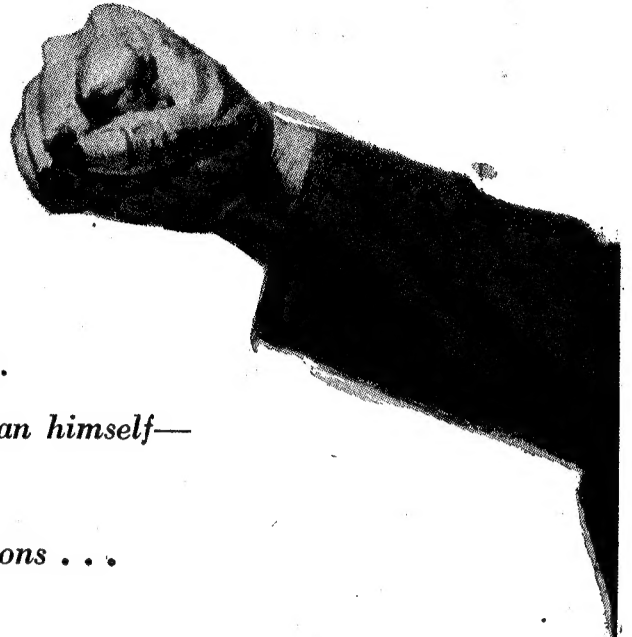
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Training Camp Champ



*A training camp is no place for a grudge fight.
Especially when the principals are the Big Man himself—
the Champ—and a very battered
has-been with nothing more than good intentions . . .
and one last Sunday punch*

When the rain stopped, I put on my jacket and stood at the door of the screened porch.
“I’m going to town,” I said.

The Champ lowered the magazine he was reading. “Keep your hands off my car.”

“Now, Champ,” I said. “I can drive all right in the country and in small towns. It’s just when I have to go in city traffic that I get confused.”

Eli Struther was at a small table playing solitaire. “Take my car, Gillie,” he said.

I put on my cap. “Thanks, Eli. But I was going to walk, anyway, for the exercise. I was just explaining to the Champ so that he wouldn’t have to be worried about me driving his car.”

The Champ turned a page of his magazine and didn’t say anything.

“Get me a couple of cigars, will you, Gillie?” Eli said.

“Sure, Eli,” I said. “I’ll be glad to.”

Outside it was still damp, but the air felt good on my face and I breathed real deep while I walked down the long driveway.

I was almost to the gravel road leading to town when the girl came out of the woods.

She was around twenty-two or -three, I guess, and she had light brown hair and blue eyes. I’d seen her around the place before, but never close enough to talk to.

“Hello,” I said.

She stopped and waited. “Are you one of the people at the lodge?” Her voice was kind of quiet.

“That’s right,” I said. “It’s a training camp and the Champ is training for his fight with Ed Murdock. The Champ is Al Haggert, and he’s real fast.”

(Continued on page 80)

ILLUSTRATED BY BOB ABBOTT

When he said that about Jenny, suddenly I didn’t give a damn. I smashed him hard.



Training Camp Champ

Continued from page 52

She thought a little while. "Are you a fighter, too?"

"Well," I said. "I used to be, but now I'm a sparring partner." I cleared my throat. "I'm a trainer and second, too, mostly. I just spar with the Champ when the reporters from the newspapers are around. The Champ knocked me down twice yesterday."

Her eyes were serious. "It's not nice to hit people."

I looked at the woods for a while. "Max Jennings is the Champ's manager," I said. "And Eli Struther is a regular sparring partner and so is Ken Jacobs."

There was a little breeze blowing and she put up the collar of her raincoat. "I'm going now," she said. "Good-bye."

"It's been nice to meet you," I said. "My name is Gillie Williams."

She turned and went back into the woods down a small path.

I watched her go and then started for town again.

When I got back, there was a card game going in the main room of the lodge. The Champ was playing, and Max, and Eli, and Mr. Hanson who owns the lodge.

"I got your cigars, Eli," I said. "I didn't forget."

Max has hard-looking eyes. "Well, goody for you," he said.

Eli took the cigars. "Thanks, Gillie."

I stood behind Eli and watched him play. "I met a girl in the driveway," I said. "I mean, she was a woman."

"Jenny," Mr. Hanson said.

The Champ grinned at him. "That's the half-wit? The one you keep in the attic?"

Mr. Hanson got red, but said nothing.

"She was real pretty," I said. "I saw her in the driveway and then she went into the woods."

The Champ looked at me. "I'm beginning to think it wasn't the punches with you, Gillie. You just didn't have much to start with."

"I was too slow," I said. "That was my trouble. But I could punch. Everybody

said I could, didn't they, Eli? And I could take a punch, too."

"Sure, Gillie," Eli said.

"I was on the main event once in Cincinnati," I said. "I got cut. Otherwise I could of gone ten rounds."

"Tell me again," the Champ said. "I haven't heard it since yesterday."

"Gillie," Eli said. "Would you go into the kitchen and get me an apple?"

"Sure, Eli," I said. "I'd be glad to."

Around one o'clock, the sun came out, and I took the cover off the outdoor ring.

The Champ went two rounds with Ken Jacobs and he took it easy. When Eli climbed into the ring for his turn, the wooden stands on two sides of the ring had about a hundred people in them. They pay a dollar each and they can watch the Champ spar. Maybe they can even get the Champ to autograph something.

Eli says he's thirty-five, but I think he's a lot older. He used to be a top man in his division, but he never got a chance at the title until real late, and he was knocked out in the twelfth.

A car pulled into the lot behind the stands and three reporters that I knew got out just as Eli and the Champ began sparring. There wasn't much action and the Champ looked like he wasn't trying.

At the end of the round the Champ saw the reporters and waved.

When he came out for the second round he really poured it on. Eli took most of the punches on his arms and shoulders and he slipped a lot, too, but every once in a while one would get through and he'd have to clinch.

Eli came back to the corner when the bell sounded and I talked to him. "Eli," I said. "He left himself open a lot."

Eli smiled. "Did he, Gillie?"

"Sure," I said. "You could of clipped him. Not too hard, I mean. Just so he'll learn. You wouldn't want to cut him or something just before the big fight."

Eli grinned. "That's right, Gillie."

The Champ walked across the ring. "Get

into your trunks, Gillie. We'll go a couple of rounds."

"All right, Champ," I said. "Right away."

Eli and the Champ looked at each other and the Champ's face got hard. "You don't have to like it, Eli," he said. "I don't pay you for that." He turned back to me. "Get moving, Gillie."

I changed up at the lodge and went out to the ring again. Eli acted as my second and he laced my gloves.

"Don't try any stand-off boxing," he said. "Stay in close and hang on."

"I have to make a fight of it, Eli," I said. "I can't just clinch. That wouldn't be honest."

When the bell rang, the Champ came out fast. He threw two lefts that stung my face and he chopped with a right. I tried to tie him up so that I could think over how to get started, but he backed away and hit me pretty hard.

When I finally got in close, I went for the body, but he took the punches on his arms and pushed me away.

The Champ buried a hard left in my middle and when my shoulder dropped, he put over a right that made my knees buckle.

Toward the end of the round, he caught me on the forehead with a hard hook. I was wearing headgear, but I could feel the scar tissue underneath it split.

When I got to my corner Eli took off my headgear and treated the cut. Then he began taking off my gloves.

The Champ came across the ring and he looked mad. "He's got another round to go."

Eli looked up. "He's cut and that puts a stop to this. We're in a training camp, not fighting for the title."

They looked at each other hard again, then the Champ shrugged and walked off.

When Eli and I walked back to the lodge, I spoke to him. "You shouldn't of stopped it, Eli. I could of gone on. I was a lot worse than this in Cincinnati before they stopped it."

He patted my shoulder. "Sure, Gillie."

The Champ and Max and the reporters came into the lodge a little later and I fixed drinks. I do that pretty good because I follow what Eli has typed out for me.

One of the reporters was Fred Hadley, and after he tasted his drink he said to the Champ, "What are you waiting for? Jed Kelly to die of old age?"

"I let Max do the arranging for me," the Champ said.

"Murdock's lost three out of his last five," Hadley said. "I'm surprised the Commission okayed this one as a championship fight. Kelly's the logical contender."

Max just smiled and smoked his cigar. "The Champ don't duck anybody," I said.

"I don't notice him straining to get into the same ring with Kelly," Hadley said.

"He can take care of Kelly or anybody else," I said. "And twice on Sundays."

The Champ looked at me. "Why don't you shut up?"

He reached across the table for the bottle and poured himself a drink.

"Champ," I said. "You're in training and you're not supposed to drink."

The Champ's eyes got real mad. "Get the hell out of here."



"He doesn't usually carry on like this."

I went outside and walked around the property for a while and when I got to the place where the woods started, I saw Mr. Hanson's daughter, Jenny, picking flowers. She looked at my face. "I saw you fighting and you got hurt."

"It wasn't much," I said.
"I don't think you ought to fight," she said. "You don't have to, do you?"

"Well, no," I said. "I guess not. But if I don't stay in the fight game, I wouldn't be near the people I know. They're all my friends."

She looked down at the ground. "I don't have any friends. Not even my sisters when I was a little girl. They said I was too slow about everything."

We didn't say anything for a while. We just listened to all the different kinds of birds that were in the woods and then she showed me some flowers she'd picked.

I thought a while and then I said. "Would you like to go to the show with me to-night? Eli would let me borrow his car."

She looked away. "I don't like to go to town much. People say things right out loud and I feel so bad that sometimes I cry."

"Nobody will say anything while I'm there, Jenny," I said.

She looked at her bouquet for a while. "If you really want me to, I'll go to the show with you."

When I got back to the lodge, the reporters were gone and Max and the Champ were sitting at the table with the bottle between them.

Max's face was sweating and red and he talked loud. "When they get to the top they always think they did it alone. They think their fists are their brains."

The Champ talked loud, too. "I suppose you're the one who gets in the ring and does the fighting?"

"I'm the one who gets you the easy touches and keeps stalling off the good boys. You haven't met five real fighters since you put on the gloves."

I went up to the table. "I don't think we should argue," I said. "We're all a team and each one of us has his job to do."

The Champ looked at me. "You got anything else bright to say?"

"No, Champ," I said. I stood there and they both looked at me and it made me feel funny, so I went upstairs.

Eli let me borrow his car and I promised to take care of it real good.

When Jenny got in the car, I said, "You're looking very pretty."

Color came to her face. "I don't dress up much and maybe I don't have much style."

"You've got plenty of style, Jenny," I said. "You're real modern."

I drove slow and careful to town and concentrated on my driving.

In the center of town I looked for a parking space. There was one about a block from the movie house, but it looked kind of small to me and I was going to pass it up because I need a lot of room when I try to park.

But Jenny pointed to it. "There's a place," she said.

"Oh, yes," I said. "I see it." I slowed up the car and stopped just ahead of the space. I wiped my hands on my trousers and then backed up and turned in.

It went real smooth and I didn't have to go back and forth or anything.

Jenny's voice sounded like she was ad-

miring me. "You parked so nice and easy."
"Well," I said, "it takes a sort of knack."

We got out and I put Jenny's hand in mine and we walked toward the theater.

Just ahead of us there was a drugstore and a half a dozen guys were leaning against the window.

Jenny slowed down when she saw them and I could feel her hand get tight. She was scared.

The guys at the drugstore straightened up when they saw us and they started grinning and poking elbows at each other.

I stopped Jenny and squeezed her hand. Then I went on alone and walked up to the biggest one and stood in front of him.

He must have seen what was in my eyes because he stopped smiling. It looked like he was going to get mad and say something nasty, but I guess he decided it would be better not to. He looked away.

I looked at the others, one at a time, and then I turned and went back for Jenny.

We walked right by them and they were quiet and they didn't smile.

We had popcorn and ice cream and the show was a double feature. When we got out around eleven, it was clear and warm.

Jenny kind of whispered. "I'm happy." It sounded like she wasn't sure it could happen.

I saw a dozen people close to our parked car and when we got there I saw that another car had locked bumpers with ours and was trying to get loose.

I held up my hand. "Hold it, mister. I'll jump on the bumpers and we'll get loose that way."

And then I saw that Mr. Hanson was in the driver's seat and the Champ was his passenger.

Mr. Hanson stopped his motor and got out. He was pretty unsteady and he had to use the car to hold himself up. "This pile of junk bumped into me."

"Now, Mr. Hanson," I said. "How could that happen when it was just parked there? And it isn't junk, Mr. Hanson. It's Eli's car and he takes good care of it."

The Champ got out of the car, too, and he had to lean on the open door.

Mr. Hanson swayed and I had to steady him. "Say, Champ," he said, "meet the daughter I keep in the attic."

The Champ looked at Jenny and he grinned in a funny way. "Maybe there's not much upstairs, but that doesn't matter when she's got looks like that."

He put his hand on Jenny's arm and pulled her toward him. Jenny's face was pale and she was scared again.

"Champ," I said. "Take your hand off her arm."

He kept his grin, but it didn't go to his eyes. "Who do you think you're talking to, you round-heeled punk?"

He shouldn't have said that. Not in front of Jenny.

I took a deep breath and then hit him hard. He fell back into the arms of one of the men who was watching. The man held him for a second, his mouth open like he was surprised, and then he lowered the Champ to the sidewalk.

Everybody stood quiet and watched while I climbed on top of the locked bumpers and jumped on them until they were free. Then I put Jenny in our car and we went back to the lodge.

After I put the car in the garage, I



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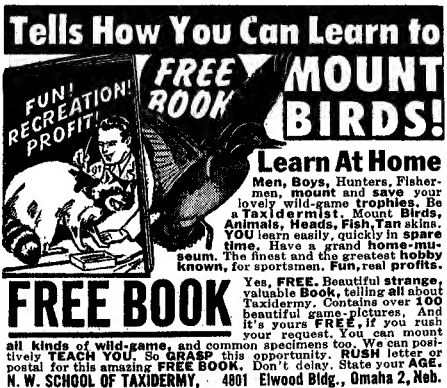


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walked Jenny back to the house behind the lodge where Mr. Hanson lived.

Jenny's face was still white in the moonlight. "Sometimes I wish my father really kept me in the attic. I wouldn't have to see anyone or have them talk about me."

I touched her cheek. "Just wait and soon nobody will ever say anything about you that isn't nice. Nobody at all."

After she went into the house, I walked back to the lodge slow in the moonlight and I thought of how people treat each other. I looked up at the stars and asked that things should turn out right for Jenny.

In the morning when I got up to wash for breakfast, Eli was just finishing.

His smile was sad. "Gillie," he said, "if I were you, I think I'd leave. What you did to the Champ last night is getting around fast."

"No, Eli," I said. "I'm going to stay for a little while yet. If I'm not already fired."

"I don't think so, Gillie," Eli said. "The Champ would like to make up for what happened in some other way. Some way that gives him more pleasure." He watched me shave. "If it's money, Gillie, I think I could spare a hundred."

"No," I said. "I got money. I saved and I've got bonds, too. I just got to stay because there's something I have to do so that everybody will look up to me and never say anything against Jenny."

By noon the Champ was feeling well enough to eat something. He didn't say anything to me, but from the way he looked at me, I knew that he was thinking about last night.

At three in the afternoon when he was ready to spar, there were four hundred people in the stands and I guess most of them were from town.

I was Eli's second and so I started fitting on his headgear, but I took my time.

The Champ climbed into the ring and walked over to us. His eyes were hard.

"Get into your trunks, Gillie," he said. "Two rounds. That's all I want."

Eli sighed and got off the stool. When he unzipped the bag I'd brought along and saw the gloves, he wrinkled his forehead and looked at me. "Man," he said. "These are six-ounce."

"There's a pair there for the Champ, too," I said. "And tell him I'm not wearing headgear."

When Eli did that, the Champ looked across the ring. He smiled in a tight way and had his headgear taken off.

Eli talked to Max for a while and then

Max sent in Ken Jacobs to act as a referee. I don't think Max wanted to have one at all.

At the bell, the Champ came out tapping his gloves together and there was a satisfied light in his eyes.

I waited for him to come to me, and then I put out a straight left that caught him in the mouth. His face got red because he was so mad, and he bored in, throwing punches for the body. Some of them were low, but Ken didn't do anything about it.

The Champ and I stood with our heads on each other's shoulders and pounded.

He broke first and backed away. He hitched up his trunks and then threw a long right that got me on the cheekbone.

I came in low, trying to crowd him into the ropes. I got him into a corner and landed a few good punches.

The Champ clinched and butted me. The half-healed cut over my eyebrow split open and blood began trickling down.

The Champ concentrated on getting at it with long rights until the bell.

In my corner, Eli got to work. "Gillie," he said, "it was a good round for you and you surprised me. But don't you think this is a good time to quit?"

"I got three minutes more, Eli," I said. I smiled a little. "Don't worry, Eli. I won some of my fights."

When the Champ came out for the second round, I met him with a left hook that straightened him and made him back up. I followed and scored with another left and then a right cross.

I pushed him out of a clinch and saw a flicker in his eyes. It was like he wasn't sure about me any more.

I pounded his body and then switched to his head. He blinked when I found him with a good straight right.

I measured him and threw another right, faster and harder than I thought I could. It caught him on the side of the jaw and he went down.

Ken waited until I got to a neutral corner and then began a slow count.

The Champ was on his feet at six, but he didn't look so eager any more.

I went for him and we stood toe to toe, slugging it out. He threw about two punches to one of mine, but mine were harder. A lot harder.

He broke away and backed up. I followed and put a lot of muscle behind a left hook that dropped him again.

He rolled over and I thought he'd be able

to make the count easy. But then I looked at his eyes and I saw he wasn't going to try. I think I shook my head. He wasn't really a champ. Not to me.

The bell rang at the count of eight and I looked at Max at the gong. He'd made it a two-minute round and we both knew it.

I turned and went back to my corner and waited. The Champ's seconds began taking off his gloves.

I held out my hands to Eli. "All right. You can take mine off, too. I'm done here."

When I left the ring with Eli, he was grinning.

"I guess I'd better quit my job now," I said.

He kept grinning. "You think you got a choice?"

When we were inside the lodge, I sat down and rested. "Eli," I said after a while, "I never thought about it before, but I'm really lonely."

"We're all lonely, Gillie."

"I know," I said. "But with people like me and Jenny it's a different kind of loneliness. You're my friend, Eli, but I think you feel sorry for me. That's why I'm lonely, Eli, even when I got friends."

Eli didn't say anything.

"You know, Eli," I said. "I always thought that Max and the Champ were my friends. I don't think so now. I think they never liked me."

Eli had a funny smile that made him look a lot older than thirty-five.

After I dressed and packed, I went to Mr. Hanson's house. Jenny was sitting on the porch steps and I think she was waiting for me.

Her eyes went to my face. "You got hurt again, Gillie."

"I beat him, Jenny," I said. "And everybody knows it. That makes me the Champ, even if it happened in a training camp."

"That's true, Gillie," she said. Her voice was low. "Are you going away now?"

"Would you miss me if I did, Jenny?"

Her eyes met mine. "Oh, yes, Gillie. I'd miss you very, very much."

I was quiet while I thought a little. "Jenny," I said. "A lot of people feel sorry for me."

Jenny's eyes got big in surprise. "But why, Gillie? You're the World Champion. And you can drive a car and talk to people and all those things."

She looked at me and smiled.

It was the most beautiful smile in the world and I knew that we would never say good-bye.

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Las Vegas on a Shoestring *Continued from page 33*

lot of card games, and I've shot crap in the Army and on living-room floors. But I've never been in a gambling casino. What should I do and what should I avoid?"

We still had a couple of hours for our trip, so I told him what I could.

The big hotels on the "Strip" just outside of Las Vegas are like resort hotels: handsome, well-furnished rooms, a well-kept swimming pool, shops and restaurants. Everything is what it should be for the convenience of the guests.

The main dining room is also a theater. We had already discussed that.

Just past the lobby, on the way to the

dining room, is the casino, well lighted, air-conditioned, lined with slot machines, and full of equipment for the other games.

There are four main ways to gamble in the casinos—slot machines, roulette, dice (craps) and blackjack. Some of the hotel casinos in town offer other games, such as various forms of bingo and a wonderfully complicated kind of rummy, called Panguigne. Since Cousin Henry wanted to stay on the Strip, we discussed only the four main games.

Slot machines are pretty much the same all over the country. You insert a dime, or quarter, or dollar, yank on the handle and wait for the spinning dials to stop.

No skill is necessary. Each machine is

carefully regulated to pay out a certain percentage of what is fed into it. If you stick with the same machine for hours on end, you're bound to lose. If you scatter coins into many different machines, you might just happen to be lucky enough to hit jackpots and get more out than you put in.

The house "edge" is the thing to watch out for in roulette, dice and blackjack. In the long run, this is what controls how much you lose. Briefly, the house has an advantage of 5.26 per cent in roulette; 1.4 per cent in craps, and less than one per cent in blackjack.

This means that you need fantastically good luck to win at roulette. You can win at craps with only moderately good luck.